From the Phenomena to the Event. The *Anamorphosis* of the Event

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FROM THE PHENOMENA TO THE EVENT.
THE ANAMORPHOSIS OF THE EVENT

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Abstract

Assuming that the phenomenon is something different from the event, this essay proposes a phenomenological description of the phenomenon’s road until the status of event is reached. Using the anamorphosis in a methodological way, this itinerary consists of three steps. Following the phenomenological concept of phenomenon, borrowed from Heidegger and Husserl’s writings, the first step of this detachment unveils the con-tingence, grasped in Jean-Luc Marion’s manner, as “what affects me’. The following step is the isolation of the facticity of the incident of any other innerworldly occurrence. Finally, the identification and description of three main features of the event constitutes the most radical anamorphosis, that of the separation of the event itself from the factically lived incident. The preoccupation to rename the metaphysical and commonly, daily meanings of the event accompanies this whole approach.

Keywords: event, phenomenology, anamorphosis, phenomenality, con-tingency, incident, facticity, Husserl, Heidegger, Marion.

I. Introduction

Are we still allowed to speak about one “singular” philosophy, that philosophy which unifies diversity in an unique thought, an unique idea or a theme of highest generality, which gives at the same time meaning to the motivational whole from where it came?

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In the event we consent to generalize without a preliminary “sociology” of contemporary philosophical preferences, that one may indicate another “pathmark” on the road of thinking: the event. The multitude of preoccupations of different areas of culture\(^2\) attest the event to be probably the last historical recognisable universal philosophy. Also, the desire for novelty which rules the understanding and the transmission of daily events, in a journalistic fashion\(^3\), increases the importance of the task of thinking the event.

However, it is quite clear that we cannot claim to provide an exhaustive explanation of a concept of event obtained after synthesizing a material suffocating through vastness and also confusing due to the imprecision of the discourse and theme. Perhaps it is only the brilliance that can direct the “seeker” of the event on his own road, clearing the obstacles and preventing the slippage in digressions and divagations which, unfortunately, are too often seen in almost all cultural milieus.

Without stating the ambiguous notions in which the event is frequently discussed, the synthesis of what is common to all its determinations seems to be an useless method. However, if such an approach is possible, it would involve the knowledge of a large interdisciplinary field. To enumerate only a few applications in which the event, this proteic notion, takes part, we shall start with its

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\(^2\) Since the vastness of the problematic dedicated to the event, I confine myself to mentioning only two methodologic ways, as they have been named in Marlène Zarader’s paper (“The Event between Phenomenology and History”, 2005): (a) as a phenomenological concept, the event became a favourite theme of French Phenomenology. Following the footsteps of M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer and M. Merleau-Ponty, this paradigm became crucial in French Philosophy starting with the ’80s, together with the research of Jean-Luc Marion, Françoise Dastur, Jocelyn Benoist and Claude Romano. This essay refers mostly to this tradition; (b) as an historiographical concept, the preference for this theme in the Sciences of Spirit is owed to Pierre Nora’s famous article from 1974, „Le retour de l’événement”, which anticipated further great masterpieces like Logique du sens (G. Deleuze) or L’être et l’événement (A. Badiou). However, we must not ignore mainly the importance of P. Ricoeur’s L’histoire et vérité or of the three tomes of Temps et récit that could be framed into both ways.

systematization pertaining to the study of the ways of reading and writing history, continuing with the idea of event in natural sciences and eventually finishing with the logical paradoxes and elements of the set theory⁴.

Always in motion, therefore impossible for us to define it, configuring and reconfiguring in new forms of expressing itself, the event also becomes a privileged theme for phenomenology. What can phenomenology teach us about the event? Almost nothing, if we continue to think exclusively from the perspective illustrated by the principle “back to things themselves!” , because “an event is not a thing, but something astir in a thing” (Caputo 2007, 48). If, instead, we think that the event may be another instance of the phenomenality, it definitely has to become a priority for phenomenology. Simple, but also difficult, this observation is sufficient for us to build up the sketch of an ‘anathreptic’ scenario for a constitution of the event.

II. The Concept of Anamorphosis

In natural attitude, we are “conscious of the world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time” (Husserl 1983, 51), a world populated by physical objects, technical devices and animated beings, always “co-present” in our daily preoccupation with things, which is always directed to certain ends. The world of natural attitude also consists of “idealities” found in the theoretical attitude, e.g. when we calculate, reason or make various judgements. Moreover, we are “immemorially” familiar with mythical-religious attitudes and thus we share beliefs and convictions about the world as a whole and its meaning. Similarly, we appreciate and admire objects which we consider artistic.

All of these contents of the experience are given to our consciousness within an unseizable perceptive flow, “initially and for

the most part” formless, called “phenomenality”. However, we cannot say that all of these resemble an event, at least not in the common way of understanding it – “something unusual”, apart from daily routine – that keeps our attention and affects us in every way. In a broad sense, the event is something that opposes and, at the same time, gives form to all this neutral phenomenality.

Therefore, not everything that appears in conscienteness as an immanent object is an “event”. Although Husserl often mentions “psychic events” and here and there mentions the enigmatic “fact of world” (Weltfaktum), we are convinced that he did not mean to build a lexicon of the event. For us, to think in attempt to overcome the indistinction between phenomenon and event in favor of the later, we have to revisit the canonic determinations of phenomenon, which, as a matter of fact, we are beginning to do. How does the event occur in this formless and also irregular phenomenality?

Let us consider Heidegger’s famous meaning of phenomenon in Being and Time: “what shows itself in itself (das Sichzeigende)” (Heidegger 1996, 25). It is known that the German philosopher begins from the Greek meaning of phainomenon, distinguishing between phenomenon as “what is self-showing”, “what is manifest” and phenomenon as “semblance”. So, let us admit the existence of a frontier which separates the flow of what appears to us perceptively, projective or retentionally, and what evades this flow. Following the perspective opened by Jean-Luc Marion in Being Given, we could name this frontier anamorphosis.

In Husserl’s phenomenology, the event designates every appearance (Erscheinung) which occurs during temporal flow, and therefore not being enough “phenomenological” for some independent analysis. It is mentioned in relation to objective realities: objective space, world of objects and physical things (Husserl 1991, 6), but also in defining acts of consciousness (emotions) or acts of embodiment (kinesthetic sensations). The appearance of a temporal object (e.g. duration of a melody) in the flow of consciousness involves a wide range of “psychical events”: anticipation, based on its retention in this flow, or, on the contrary, the absence of anticipation (a sound yet unheard, but which equally contributes to the unity of the melodic line) (26). Even other acts related to internal consciousness of time, as the representation of an object in consciousness (50) or apprehension – intention of an empty content – (51) have been labeled as “psychical events”.

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Anamorphosis referred initially to an widely spread aesthetic technique, especially in painting and music. This technique is possibly known since ancient times (Romanesque churches and even prehistoric caves), and is famous in paintings like The Two Ambassadors of Holbein the Younger (the apparition of the skull and crossbones on the canvas), or in optical illusions.

This technique is also characterized by directing the viewer/listener’s perception until an unique form has been isolated, towards an unique and precise point that springs from an indistinct, atonal surface. On the other side, this “bringing to visibility” corresponds to a reformation of the whole compositional ensemble. Therefore, anamorphosis could be understood as an “upsurge” in phenomenality (ana-morphé), as we are accustomed to talk about upsurge in different factical situations: upsurge of sap, of fever, of blood pressure. The anamorphosis establishes the “distance” which separates the luxurious appearance from the vague, concealed aspect of semblance.

At or after the end of this essay, we will have the opportunity to determine three such anamorphosis in an “anathreptic” way. This notion names the method used by Plato, specifically in Major Hippias. In the context of the Platonic dialogue, the question “what is beauty?” allows seven or eight consecutive “upsurges” from individual beauty to more and more general, close to the Idea, expressions of the beautiful. Even if anamorphosis does not lead to generality – because in its way of manifesting, the event forbids something like generality – this approach will be an anathreptical one, in so far as it takes into account three such consecutive upsurges of phenomenality.

First of them, con-tingency, separates what interests us (“what affects us”) from every other forms of phenomenality, bound to remain indistinct by our neutral attitude to them. If these phenomena that occur in nature and also affect us can also be considered as con-tingencies, the next anamorphosis, determined by factical encounter, will be rendered by incidental character. Finally, the last and the most radical anamorphosis determines what kind of encounters are the ones that are suitable for the name of event. The full status of the event will be marked by using three determinations: an-archical character, certitude and incommunicability. These three anamorphosis (con-tingence, incident and event) lead us in the
direction of configuration of a proper concept of the event, which eliminates, at least in this phenomenological framework, all non-differentiated utterances and also “self evidences” that confuses the event with the phenomenon.

III. First Anamorphosis: Con-Tingency

Before anamorphosis manifests, the world’s phenomenality proved to be formless, opaque, devoid of an unique point from which the perceptive flow unifies and reshapes the ensemble from which it came. Phenomenality in itself does not render anything to attention, except for its own visibility. The initial lack of form which characterizes the phenomenality of the world is also completed by neutral uniformity for consciousness. It cannot exist a neutral anamorphosis in perceiving the world, as if an observer for whom the world is totally insignificant and “is all that obtrudes itself in its worldliness” (Heidegger 1996, 175), as it happens in the fundamental attunement of Angst. As, for example, the educated viewer increases the visibility of the ontic status of an “coloured being” of a painting (Marion 2002a, 47), the “upsurge” from the initial, formless manifestation to a proper phenomenality, – without being yet an event, – can not happen in a neutral manner, which characterizes at first instance the uniformity of the world.

In order to see how this “neutral-observer” – attitude opposes phenomenality, we have to discuss the other determination of the phenomenon, which belongs to Husserl. For him, every appearance is grasped as a form of duality: “the meaning of the world ‘phenomenon’ is twofold because of the essential correlation between appearing (Erscheinen) and that which appears (Erscheienden)” (Husserl 1999, 69). The aprioric correlation between the immanent object of consciousness and

6 “Before” is just another way of saying. The anamorphosis cannot be expressed temporally, which comes in anteriority or posteriority to our common perception. It may occur every time, in different degrees, as we will have the opportunity to see further. The anamorphosis of phenomenality towards incident is only the first step in this “anathreptical” succession.
its modifications cannot be separated from the background of the existence of absolute consciousness, on which this correlation is dependent. The “appearing” of an “appearance” may reach the consciousness flow in different ways, by deploying “according to an indefinite series of adumbrations” (Marion 2002a, 137): it can present itself in a different way than we expect, radically opposed to our expectations or it cannot present itself at all. In extreme, we can imagine the possibility of this missing correlation. Consciousness is nothing else but a flow of possibilities. While its “necessity” is a “condition of possibility for the meaning of the world”, the appearing is completely accidental, as Husserl stresses in the first volume of his Ideas:

Over against the positing of world, which is a “contingent” positing, there stands then the positing of my pure Ego and Ego-life which is “necessary”, absolutely indubitable positing. Anything physical, which is given “in person” can be non-existent; no mental process which is given ‘in person’ can be non-existent. (Husserl 1983, 102)

In other words, only the immanent existence of the object in consciousness is truly “necessary”. Instead, its intentional correlation, grasped as individual existence, never repeatable is “contingent”, even if we speak of the phenomenon of the world as a whole: “individual existence, of every sort is, quite universally speaking, ‘contingent’ (zufällt)” (7). Truly, everything can be framed into a temporary flow, especially the world as a whole, despite Kant’s opposition in the “Proof” of the “First Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas” (Kant 1998, 470-475), related to finitude of sensible world (mundus phaenomenon) in time and space. We cannot think or imagine an eternal world, as a simply subsisting being, or a world that never will have reached to its end.

The world has not the status of mathematical, logical, essences as “ideal” objects, that, according to the Rationalist tradition, have been established as “necessary” or “eternal” by the will of God. Nevertheless, these cannot be attributed, in phenomenological order, meaning according to their appearance, the attribute of necessity. Regardless that we speak about multiplication table or integral calculus, their learning and usage assume every time that they present to us in a specific time and space, opening new possibilities of usage. Apart from the “infinities
of numbers which no one will ever take into calculation” (Lacoste 2011, 218), an “ideality” must “affect” one every time, must be a problem regardless of the fact that one knows the solution “(the problem Pappus posed to Descartes), knows it and does not give it (the problem Fermat posed to Fermat), or is ignorant for it and seeks it (the problem Fermat poses to us)” (Marion 2002a, 63).

To aspire to eventfulness, the simple appearance of phenomenon is far from enough. By its arriving, it should affect us (touch us, act on us, modifying us, in literal translations of German zufällig) the consciousness which experiences it, that is, by reshaping the classical concept of “contingence” to break through the barrier of uniformity: “no phenomenon can appear without coming upon me, arriving to me, affecting me as an event that modifies my field (of vision, of knowledge, of life, it matters little here)” (125). According to French phenomenologist’s interpretation, one of the features of this reshaped concept (con-tingence) is unpredictable landing (arrivage): “the original contingency of the phenomenon is accomplished by its unpredictable landing” (133). Starting from here, a brief schema of phenomenality which contains both a) subsistent beings and b) things “at hand” or useful things can be unfolded.

a) Why the “unpredictable landing” of some phenomena is qualified by non-indifference which themselves impose on the uniformity of the world? For the simple reason that every phenomenon of this sort does not arrive unexpectedly as an object, but at first glance, as lived by consciousness. For something to land unexpectedly, we first have to wait for it, to “have-something-in-advance” (Vor-haben), (Husserl 1970, 51), that is to anticipate the phenomenon that arrives for consciousness in the absence of a sensible intuition, i.e. appresentation or protention. In the first situation, we take into account some aspects of the object which are not given intuitively in the present perception. For example, we expect that hidden sides of a cube to be five in a side view or we expect that the alter-ego (analysed by Husserl in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation) also has a consciousness, but we can never experience it given as flesh. In the second situation, we intend the future by experience contents which are not given yet, for example we expect that a subsistent object as the ground, remains under our feet when we step on a solid surface. In both situations, the intended object is not indifferent to us and this is shown
by the fact that, every time, we are those who “say something about it”, we describe through language the degree of determination or vacuity of a specific situation: “our expectations on the level of perception are those of what we can say about our actual perception when we undertake to describe it” (Romano 2009, 38). That “all discourse about ... which communicates in what it says has at the same time the character of expressing itself” (Heidegger 1996, 152) reinforces the personal, contingent character of the expectation. Given the situation of the appresented object, we say, for example, that we could expect the other sides of the cube to exist and to be in number of five and we also say that we could not expect to guess their colours. Similarly, we are those who determine in a sentence a fact of protention: we say that we expect a heavy rainstorm in a specific time frame, based on the atmospheric conditions and the weather forecast. But we cannot determine precisely the time when rain occurs.

For its part, the unexpected essentially originates from the predisposition of an anticipation. Unpredictable landing (arrivage) means our impossibility to “fore-see” the phenomena before seeing them, without warning and without the possibility to calculate their deviation from their usual path. Taking into consideration the contingent and expressible feature of the expectation, we can also draw some conclusions on that what evades the anticipation. The movement between what corresponds to our expectations and what is unpredictable creates degrees of configuration of the novelty of surprise. We become aware of these degrees only afterwards, when “surprise has torn through the fabric of our expectations, that we realize that we could have said it, that we could have expressed those expectations” (Romano 2009, 43) as: (i) the novelty of every perception, obtained after turning the cube and (ii) the novelty that denies our expectations, remaining, nevertheless, related to these. Even if the weather suddenly got colder, dark clouds gathered on the sky and all weather forecasts announced it, we cannot hide the surprise in front of an unusual snowfall at the beginning of the autumn.

b) Until now, the second condition of eventfulness, contingency, conceived as “what touches me” was highlighted by characterization, even if too general, of unpredictable landing. The novelty that denies our
expectations in appresentation or protention pertains to every consciousness, but this observation is far from assuming the formation of something more than a “psychical event”, in Husserl’s words. That is why, brought to the incidental status, novelty must occur in a factual context, even a limited one. If until now we dealt only with ideal objects (the cube) and subsistent objects (the heavy rainstorm or the unusual snowfall at the beginning of the autumn), our attention turns now to what we encounter in the (begegnet) innerwordly preoccupation: the useful thing and the technical device (zuhanden). Even in this situation, phenomenality fully certifies the non-indifferent character of the world. According to its specifics, to come upon me (m’advient) belongs to con-tingence and represents another step to overcome the phenomenality towards eventfulness.

The phenomenality of the tool does not manifest in the absence or in incapacity of the practitioner. It appears in itself only when there exists a user able to handle it and who agrees to a training that exasperates his patience, burdens his memory and humiliates him in front of more experienced users. In this respect, tools may be named masonry tools, programming languages, foreign languages we learn by mechanical repetitions of terminations, declinations and conjugations and even our native language. All of us agree with the rules applied to its usage, feeling that it addresses us, despite their generality.

As Heidegger remarks, the tool reaches its maximal phenomenality only after withdrawing: “what is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy” (Heidegger 1996, 65). The fact that it breaks, that it irritates us when it’s missing or it bothers us (1996, 68) when it is in the way implies every time that it has lost its practicability and, consequently, it disturbs the whole ensemble of useful things that configures the innerworldly handiness. There are situations when corruption of a device, for example of a computer, may disturb the work for a couple of hours or even days for all employees of an office. Furthermore, a power failure can affect the function of many household electrical appliances in a given area. In opposition to Heidegger’s observation, things at hand manifest their con-tingent phenomenality even in “working order”, despite that, in these situations, devices cannot manifest themselves without the theoretical well-versed consciousness
of the “expert”, the “technician” or the “troubleshooter”. On the other hand, the incident of finding out that even an apparently insignificant thing at hand is “missing” (a certificate, a bill or a file), leads to a “breach in the context of references discovered in our circumspection” (1996, 70). Only from this moment, the thing at hand is rediscovered in its purposefulness (“what-for”) and the unlikely contingencies for its replacing begin.

Following these remarks, a question remains open: whether and how an organized, repetitive work, in which the main emphasis is the foreseen anticipation and in which the unpredictable landing has only a secondary role, may be conceived as an event, in a whole meaning. In other words, how can one catch the “eventfulness” of centuries-colossal work of building the pyramids, Gothic cathedrals and generally the effort spent for every epochal discovery consigned by history? Are we allowed to speak about a “processual” development of the event? As we described those episodes which emphasized the thing at hand encountered within a world (the tool, the device, the equipment), we observe that phenomenality reaches a new significant stage, anamorphosis on its way to reach the event – the incident.

IV. Second Anamorphosis: Incident

A succession of appearances occurs unexpectedly in the contingent innerworldly horizon. Among them, the “unperceivable light” of a thunder-flash that rifts the sky, the far-away thunderbolt that makes the windows tremble, the deaf noise that accompanies the fall of a flowerpot from a sill blown by the wind or the faint popping sound crack and the

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7 In this context, it would be opportune to discuss in depth about the conditions of possibility and also the limits of specialization. May the task of the technician from the control station or the specialist in a specific field of medicine match to that of the “specialist” in a certain domain of philosophy or even that of an artist? Is there any difference between that one whose competence is only respiratory disorders and that one whose skills and qualification are based in “medieval philosophy”, “history of science” and even novel or poetry writing?
spreading of the shards on the road that anticipates the noise of a car burst door and the quarrel between the protagonists of the accident, evades, by the way they create their own specific context, the uniformity of the formless phenomenality.

These incidents, – we name them in this way to distinguish them from metaphysical accident – surpass the foreseeing of the anticipation and its exception, the unexpected, which were discussed in previous analysis on appresentation and protension. One encounters incidents only in situations similar to the device that refuses to function. Before moving to the next level of constitution, namely to this new anamorphosis, of the phenomenality described before, a confusion persists and we address this below.

Among superior phenomena, one could mention even innerworldly changes, which apparently do not “arrive for us”, like subsistent beings. About these, average intelligibility, influenced by the daily-journalistic approach of the “event”, qualifies their disastrous appearance as “extreme”: avalanches, floods, earthquakes. Their contingency seems to be doubtful, especially because their expression through language is ambiguous and, consequently, their ontic status remains undetermined. Whilst some “ordinary” phenomena, as “it rains”, “it lights” the sky, “it snows” are impersonally expressed, the others have a quite determined individuality. For example, when we speak about “Hurricane Katrina”, we all know precisely what we mean, even though many other phenomena of almost this kind occur every year in different regions of the Earth. However, such an amplitude innerworldly ‘appearance’ was known only once, and there is no chance for it to repeat itself.

Although language ambiguities disappear since, in dealing with such subsistent beings, one takes into account their “lack of ontic assignation” (Romano 1998, 37). Unlike some other “facts” which are reducible to a sentence-subject, about subsistent beings we cannot say anything, except that “they occur”, as innerworldly facts: they do not have their own “historicity”, even a rudimentary one. Their mere existence is not due to anyone else but their own occurrence. In other words, we cannot affirm their existence, unless a witness associates them in hermeneutical contexts. Heidegger plays on this idea too, when he says that “only Da-sein can be meaningful (sinnvoll) or meaningless
(sinnlos)” (Heidegger 1996, 142). Following him, Sartre expresses it in a similar way: “in the absence of this witness, there is being before and after the storm – that is all. If a cyclone can bring about the death of certain living beings, this death will be destruction only if it is experienced as such” (Sartre 1984, 8). Even though, because these group of phenomena are not destined to someone, their unpredictable landing occurs without anything else than itself, as long as there is a witness these are not indifferent to us, and consequently, they are also submitted to con-tingence.

As becomes clear from the above analysis, some innerworld “extreme” facts, as subsistent beings, without “ontic assignation”, manifest their con-tingent character of unpredictable landing within the pre-determined context of the world, in its meaning of simply subsistent being.

However, the same thing cannot be said about the incident. When we refer to it, we often point out its “violent encounter” feature, according to which it imposes every time factically. Heidegger stresses explicitly that, apart from all beings, only Da-sein has a special encounter with beings at hand, with those like him and even with subsistent beings, unlike “two beings which are objectively present within and are, moreover, worldless in themselves, can never ‘touch’ each other, neither can ‘be’, ‘together with’ the other ” (Heidegger 1996, 52). Only due to the encounter, in accordance to its con-tingent nature, the incident is not indifferent to us, as we are not “distant” from it, it must every time happen only in a factical context. Even if counter-intuitive, when we skid on a frozen street, lose balance and for a moment feel the shock of the blow, the incident commences from us, we are those who “oppose” the ice, “bring about the encounter” (sich begegnen) with the ice, and not viceversa. Regardless of the incident’s scale and proportions, in a colloquial language, even when we talk about a collision that we qualify without thinking about it as being a crash, and even when we talk about incidents between protesters and security forces, we highlight the factical character of the incident. Incident may occur in any of the factical varieties; thus it is not a special situation with on and off occurrence: when we “produce” something, when we use tools or technical devices, and, as shown above, even when, in case of a breakdown these interrupt their proper function, when we talk to somebody (facticity of the everyday being-with) and even when, stupefied, we notice the ravages
and ruins of an ‘extreme’ innerworld calamity. The undetermined manner in which a con-tingent fact can lead to an incident, without being in itself an incident, was observed by Aristotle (1025a 28-29). One’s unintentional arrival to Aegina is due to a situation which depends on a context, accordingly, on an external (heteron) situation: the tempest. Even the theoretic observation of a tempest or the astonishment in front of the eruption of a volcano may appear as incidents.

Before going further, we have to face a new confusion. Common language does not distinguish between the phenomenological concept of incident and the metaphysical meaning of accident. The self-evidence of common sense understanding interprets them as if among these there is a subordination relationship, as the one of species to genus. In the same way as con-tingence, the translation and the re-formulation of the notes of the “accident” (symbebēkos as “what goes with”, in a literally translation) from the metaphysical language of Aristotle into the phenomenological notes of the incident is owed to Jean-Luc Marion, too (Marion 2002a, 151 sq.). However, the definition of the dictionary, that of “a small – event that comes up” and implicitly, the drawing of a dividing line between incident and the event on exclusively quantitative criteria, broadly plausible in the broader context of the determination of the event as “saturated by quantity”, cannot satisfy us in our approach to range phenomenality in its road to becoming the event.

Until now, the incident was characterized by contrast to innerworld appearances through the factical context in which it occurs. Even if it appears within a “productive” activity, as withdrawing the tool or the unpredictable material of production, or it appears on the street traffic as a crash or it manifests into a painful injury which “sets us aside” for the moment, the incident cannot affect us except in a restricted, determined factical context, without modifying radically the course of facticity in which it occurs. Moreover, the incident implies a definite number of quasi-inexhaustible causal explanations which lends itself to a complex causal “archeo-logy” (Romano 1998, 57). Thus, the crash of two automobiles may be reduced, if one eliminates its small variables for the physical calculus, to the action and reaction principle, as the skid on the ice may be reduced to frictional forces and the law of falling bodies, after a methodical abstraction. In conceiving the incident, physical explanations
may be doubled by psychological or sociological explanations: the same age, the same affiliation to a circle of friends, common intellectual interests contribute, as “sufficient reasons” to an encounter. An encounter may certainly be conceived as “confrontation”, – if not as an “opposition” with every appearance that occurs innerworldly: we are facing a foreign landscape, an experience so terrifying for the one who experienced it to later recall it, even the street that “sticks” itself to one’s shoe soles which, according to another observation of Heidegger, is ontologically further remote than the acquaintance one meets while walking twenty steps away (Heidegger 1996, 99).

Among all of these, there are a few incidents which are privileged because they lead directly to understanding the mode of being of the event. As, at this time, Claude Romano points out, “an encounter that will eventually be capital can seem insignificant at first; an incurable sickness could take the form of the benign condition at the beginning” (Romano 2009, 46). We might, as well, affirm the opposite. It is possible that one’s encounter with one’s own past (lived in awareness or the immemorial), as in the first situation, to be a missed one. In this respect, what does truly mean the encounter with the other, with our own death and, even more genuinely, the encounter with our own birth?

From this point, we could infinitely ask regressive questions. From what it means the real “encounter” with the parents, to an authentic experience of the others and from an appropriate approach to our death to an adequate meaning of our “original non-originality of the origin” (Romano 1998, 96) attested by the phenomenon of our birth. Eventually, the ultimate confrontation faces the human with history. This was splendidly expressed by Balzac in the words of his character, Rastignac at the gates of Paris: “now it’s between us!”. How could we find out the meaning of the confrontation between the individual human and the event “that changes the face of the world”? Of course, we cannot find answers to this avalanche of problems, where each of them needs specific contexts of interpretation. All we can do, starting with some

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8 As in the above mentioned meaning that the translation of begegnet has shown.
V. Third Anamorphosis: The Event

Only the event institutes the phenomenality of the breakthrough. What was only foreshadowed in the analysis of the unpredictable contingency and the factical incident fulfills now in the form of a radical discontinuity. Remember that our initial hypothesis was that the event means something different from phenomenon. In analogy to the “event horizons” of the black holes surface in astrophysics, which supposedly, due to their immense gravitational field obstruct the entrance of any kind of radiations, what we could call event, according to this new and radical anamorphosis, forbids us, by its uncontrollable manifestation, to experience and also to express it through language. It appears “irrespective of” us and even “against” us. Is this the only reason why this “upsurge” in phenomenality is so different and so radical compared to the previous levels?

(a) Unlike the incident, the event evades its causes, so we could say that it has an anarchical character. In the light of the event, every possible or imaginable cause which could be attributed to it, which precedes it or is preceded by, cannot be considered as sufficient. That is why we will say that the event is uncontrollable; (b) the event has already occurred, without preventing us to experience and to express it in any moment lived after. As an imminent, accomplished (irrevocably done) fact, it is also certain; (c) according to its manifestation, the event blocks any possibility to say something about it and even to name it, so it has an inexpressible character. Detailing these reasons would not lead just to a careful consideration of the specificity of this anamorphosis of the highest degree, but it also opens genuine access to a “physiology” of the event, understood as radically different from a fruitless research of its “essence”, as metaphysical thinking has done for centuries.

At the first glance, the event seems, according to our road’s logic flaw, an incident “out of control”, so all we can do is to apply the strategy of thinking the event starting from the incident. The minor
outbreaks of factical “encounters” which we have characterized as *incidents* may or may not spread uncontrollably, but this does not mean that the *incident* should be placed as the origin of the *event*. On the contrary, the *event* is identical to its own origin and fundamentally different from all that the “first cause” notion intends. Even if, occurring every time according to the instantaneous character of *unpredictable landing*, in an order always determined by a factical context, the *event* is the one that overthrows and also reshapes the context by its unique manifestation.

In opposition to what was attributed to a causal chain or to a finality, in the *incident*’s case, the *event* (a) proves its an-arhic character that goes beyond any causal horizon. Even if it occurred in a factical context, an *event* cannot be foreseen by anything, so one cannot explain it by only invoking explanations, hypothesis, theories or ideologies. These come only after the *event* “has passed”, even if, technically speaking, the event does never “passes away”. If we could conceive it in a causal manner, the *event* reduces its worth to the status of thing at hand (a technical device, *Zuhandenheit*) and which, through its usage we can foresee, or, more specific, to a factical, meaningless “meeting” and without consequences. The casual coming across of two neighbors almost every day in the nearest park will not have the importance of an *event*, of that anamorphosis emphasised by J.-L. Marion in his example of Montaigne’s friendship with La Boéthie (Marion 2002b, 37). The respectful, although indifferent glimpse of the neighbors does not correspond to that “looking for each other before seeing each other” or to the thoughtful attempt to situate the other one “to the point where the look of the other could, consequently, settle on him”. The *incident* of the predictable coming across in the park does not break the rhythm of factical life, its occurrence is not without warning or anticipation. Even if, in this situation, there is a certain degree of unexpectedness, the *incident* has nothing to do with a “celebration”, does not refer to anything else but the neighbors’ state of affairs: the walk in the park.

If not every factical encounter leads to an *event*, the *event* often manifests as an encounter which is uncontrollable, unlike the *incidental* coming across. In this respect, one can talk about “traumatic” experiences, as the terrifying moments of experiencing death in any of its forms (the other’s death, the omnipresent death in the battlefield,
even our own death), the incomparable intensity of a religious revelation or an artistic vocation (Romano 2009, 44 sq.) and even more, the crucial phenomenon of birth impossible to reconstitute, since it occurred “without us” (Marion 2002b, 41, Romano 1998, 95-112). Although one’s death may be always attributed to a convergence of causes, embracing a vocation may be attributed to some innate features and somebody’s birth may be patiently prepared and expected, we can say that none of these were decided and suggested. Even if we understand the causes of one’s death and we come to terms with our own death, we cannot conceive causally and rationally the privileged now (das Jetzt), that occurs in precisely that moment. The representation of “suddenly” (corresponding to Greek to exaiphnes) that marks the passing over from the living body to the simply subsistent being of a dead corpse remains one of the great mysteries of humanity, which cannot be solved by causality by all means. Likewise, the dreadful moment of the “caesura” instituted by the terrifying “order” and felt by the “chosen one”, determines the latter to simply give up in his attempt to look for an explanation, suddenly modifying his worldview, along with his past acquisitions and their alleged possibilities: “in a certain sense, the conversion isn’t carried out by anyone: Paul has not been converted by representatives of ‘the Church’; he has not been won over. [...] The event – ‘it happened’ purely and simply, in the anonymity of a road”, appreciates Alain Badiou the breakthrough which turned Saul from a prosecutor to an Apostle (Badiou 1997, 17; The Acts of the Apostles, 9:3-6).

If we refer to the situation of our own birth, the dismissal of causality is even more difficult to notice, because we are not confronted with an appearance different from all others. In spite of being factically “present” to our own moment of origin, in our lifetime we never cease to intend it. Neither the study of genealogies nor testimonies of those present to this originary moment or our own secondary memories can explain this event that paradoxically “does not belong to us”. Apart from death, at which appearance one can “still do something”, (as Tolstoy shows in the novel The Death of Ivan Ilyitch), birth presents itself as “once for all”. However, this initial character manifests ceaselessly as the original apperception of “I am”, implied every time in every conscious
act. Moreover, beyond its quality of “originary impression”, the birth, more than death or spiritual rebirth, refers to other events that do not appear in our consciousness as major collective, large manifestations, to which history has gave over time the “epochal” meaning and which, in turn, confirm the anarchy of the event. Even the historical event eludes its causes and thus the causes always come after it, in spite of the overabundant information, sources, testimonies, documents, statistics of all kind. By this, we certainly do not suggest that the titanic work of an “army” of archivists, scholars, historians would be useless, but only that, no matter how well documented, this work could not express the entire meaning of the event: “the event has no causes, because it is its own origin. In it truly lies the authentic meaning of human adventure” (Romano 1998, 60).

In other words, in its quality of accomplished fact, we can observe some causes of the event, to find others and even imagine counterfactually how it could have happened otherwise. All of these belong to the continuity of history, accepted by the event. But none of these, all the permutations among them and even all of these combined, could light the “spark” that delivers the burst: “it is precisely this overabundance that forbids assigning it a cause, and even forbids understanding it through a combination of causes” (Marion 2002a, 168).

(b) If it is true that the event signifies mainly the evasion of causality, one may argue that the truth of Sarajevo assassinate, which, as we know, commenced the hostilities of First World War, appears to have the same ontological status as the certainty of our own death: “the fact that demise, as an event that occurs, is ‘only’ empirical certain, in no way decides about the certainty of death” (Heidegger 1996, 238). The certainty does not show us only that the event evades the amount of all its causes, but also its accomplished fact, which even happened once and for all, even if it is imminent, namely it cannot be avoided in anyway. Considering that, what has already occurred has the certain, irremediable character of an accomplished fact, and consequently nobody is ever able to remove its traces, in the same way what stays in front of us cannot be avoided or experienced by another whom we ask to “take our place for a moment”.
The premonition of its radical novelty (the feeling that “nothing is going to be the same from now on”), which follows the progress of a historical event, cannot be anticipated in comparison to other previous events. Therefore, the certainty of the event lies on the nonrepeatable absorbency of every kind of imaginable cause which could be assigned to it and manifests by changing the “texture” of this causality, by breaking the arrangement of the factual context from which it stems and eventually infringe even upon the world’s con-tingence, as it was established after the first anamorphosis. Even if the event lands every time “for us”, according to its con-tingence, it establishes a special form of necessity – a phenomenological, not metaphysical necessity. Accordingly, the event seems to be uncontrollable and either impossible for us to handle. In this respect, maintaining that we are the ones who “propose”, “organize” or “participate” to “events”, is just an improper way of speaking. Unlike the incident, which we could “oppose”, the specificity of the anamorphosis of the event consists of the impossibility of consciousness to control it. However, its infringement on the con-tingence is not a complete one, as long as not even only one who was touched by the “eye” of the event’s “cyclone” could remain indifferent. This is shown clearly below, in the analysis of the event in the frame of the discourse.

(c) Following the twofold meaning, borrowed from J.-L. Marion, the anamorphosis takes into account the element able to unify the whole factual context and that which distinguishes its appearance from the tarnished, insipid semblance of this formless ensemble. In the situation of the event, it is not the semblance that remains in the secondary plane of something that “hides in its appearance”, but it determines from the beginning its mode of being. The common concept of event which is the one “distorted”, within “the possibility of being deceiving and misled” (Heidegger, 1996, 32), often manifests in the discourse.

What can, in our analysis, be put into evidence through the “common concept of event”? Is this, at the first glance, something that conceals us, as we have said, obscuring us as well, from itself? Certainly not, as long as we continue to refer to somebody’s life path as a well determined succession of “events” about which public sphere has already decided its “progress”: birth, christening, graduation, employment, finding a job, birth of the children and so on. It is possible
that their doubtful importance for us qualifies them as “events”. Understood as being “preordained”, they recreate a predetermined progress that “we can expect”, as the spaces intentionally left blank in a family album. The average comprehension does not take into account even the expression of the basic status of the eventfulness, *constingence* and its feature of *unpredictable landing*. To this degenerated understanding also contributes the average opinion, resulted from the selection generated by the hierarchy that the “others”, influenced by the tyranny of the journalistic “event”, undergo through contagion. Judging over what deserves to be transmitted and in what form was also in the preoccupations of the “professional” historians. Thus we can mention one of the critiques brought by Paul Ricoeur when he addresses incompleteness of historical objectivity, whose selection still persists another unquestionable “judgement of importance” (Ricoeur 1998, 26).

Behind the historical writings pretense to offer a certain criteria of objectivity hides the subjectivity of the one who tacitly reiterates what was transmitted to him as important.

Therefore, “initially and for the most part”, the *event* presents itself to us with these two appearances. Neither the public sphere (“the They”, following Heidegger’s so well-known expression), nor historians pretense of objectivity cannot negate that its *an-archic* and also a *certain* nature creates difficulty up to the impossibility to talk about “what-it-cannot-be-adequately-said”, the *event*. There are numerous situations in which we get frightened or stumble on words exactly for the reason that these could not express the thing we are most afraid of, the *event*. Not only we deliberately evade it, but often, even its final nature burdens to the extent of impossibility the talking about what cannot adequately be spoken. Take again the example of the *event* of death. The common talking about death is determined from the sentence: “one also dies in the end, but for now one is not involved”. In the German philosopher’s analysis dedicated to death, temptation, tranquillization and estrangement of the others in relation to the “dying person” represent an entangled flight from death which leads to an improper understanding even about their own death (Heidegger 1996, 235). If we speak about the spiritual rebirths, even under the appearance of changing a letter in the name of a character (metanomasty) in the examples of Abraham and St.
Paul, these produce a change not in just in their names, but they also reshape the world by institution of a new harmony in the universal order (Agamben 2005, 9).

In presence of the death, birth or spiritual rebirths we become speechless, thus we conclude that these have an inexpressible character. The language proves itself useless both for the one who is going to die and for those who witness his death. These are neither supreme occasions for a “final discourse” (as happens in the movies), nor occasions for “gratifying”, “festive”, “commemorative” speeches of the others. The awkwardness with which the language addresses these both an-archic and certain events is inscribed in our impossibility to control them.

Living in itself, the lingering in the while of something definitive, a situation without the possibility of being reversed, or in any case, a situation of which we know that it will never be the same, regardless if it manifests in the individual or collective realm of history, breaks the discourse. There are few events in which, by their sheer force, they break through the where anything said is equivalent with “saying nothing”. In each situation not only the word becomes useless, but also its absence. Thus, there are situations when the presence of the one who has the unpleasant task to say something is useless. While it matters a little who says “whom and what”, the solemnity or even the nuance of the humor brought in the discourse do not; practically, all that matters is the fact that the event occurred, and what was lost cannot be brought back and furthermore it cannot be brought back by words. I think that these situations that happen to leave us speechless emphasize in a kaleidoscopic or even chronological manner (although it is obvious that we speak of a different chronology) the “quiet” way in which one relates to the event.

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REFERENCES


